

North Chicago, IL - Joined by top VA and Navy officials, Congressman Mark Kirk revealed the site of the “first in the nation” joint Navy-VA Hospital. The new Naval hospital, fully integrated with the North Chicago Veterans Administration Medical Center, permanently secures high quality health care for veterans, sailors and their family members living in Northern Illinois.

“By building the Navy’s new hospital next to our VA, our northern Illinois veterans’ hospital will never close,” said Congressman Kirk. “No where else in the country is there such a relationship between the VA and the Navy. Cooperation between the two ensures the survival of veterans’ health care in Northern Illinois while upgrading the care for the men and women serving in the United States Navy.”

Joining Kirk at the signing ceremony were Gordon H. Mansfield, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. William Winkenwerder, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, Captain Michael Anderson, Commanding Officer, Naval Hospital Great Lakes and Patrick Sullivan, Director, North Chicago VA.

The new \$110 million naval ambulatory care center to be built at the VA is scheduled to open in 2010 and completes the third and final phase of fully integrating the brand new Naval hospital with the VA. The new joint hospital represents a total reversal of plans announced in 1999 to close the North Chicago VA. Congressman Kirk pledged to save the hospital during his first campaign for Congress.

In October of 2003, Kirk won approval for the first stage of the integration, moving the Navy’s mental health unit into the North Chicago VA. This blocked prior VA plans to close the veteran’s hospital. In November 2004, Kirk won approval for the second phase – a \$12 million expansion of surgery suites and emergency rooms. When this phase of integration is complete next summer, four new operating rooms and 14 new exam rooms will open for patient care. The third phase is the most ambitious – a \$110 million Naval hospital to be fully integrated with the VA.

“The new joint hospital will offer state of the art care for veterans and sailors,” said Kirk during the signing ceremony. “This includes a \$1.3 million Women’s Health Clinic and pediatric care rooms inside our VA hospital.”

Kirk was instrumental in saving the North Chicago VA from two attempts to close the hospital in 1999 and 2000. With the Naval hospital and VA less than a mile apart, Kirk brought the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs together on a plan to combine services of the two hospitals, creating a synergy that would improve health care for both veterans and sailors.

“Over 50,000 veterans live in Lake County. The census bureau projects this number will grow to 55,000 by 2010,” said Kirk. “The integration of our Navy and VA hospitals will offer better health care for our growing veterans community, sailors and their families.”

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